

VZCZCXRO0534  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #0857/01 0801507  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 201507Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6361  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 000857

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E.O.12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREZ](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT TEAM LEADERS CONFERENCE - BRINGING TEAMWORK AND  
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS TO THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL

11. Summary. On March 3 and 4, the embassy's Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) hosted the second quarterly Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Team Leaders Conference in Baghdad. This gathering of nearly every PRT, ePRT, and RRT team leader provided an ideal venue for State, DoD, and interagency participants to share lessons learned, bring focus to U.S. and local national issues that can impact progress for Iraq, and look ahead at options for condition-driven changes and adjustments for PRTs in response to the evolving Iraqi economic and political landscape. Themes that resounded throughout the conference included the incalculable value of strong State and military relations at the team level as well as the necessity for the teams to establish strong rapport and trust with their Iraqi counterparts at the provincial level. Budget execution, provincial government capacity, and private sector development are key areas necessary for Iraq to progress from its current condition to one of political and economic sustainability. This sustainability would serve as a primary indicator to signal the start of the mission's transition to a more traditional bilateral relationship with the Government of Iraq. End summary.

12. This two-day conference included participation from nearly every PRT, ePRT, and RRT out of the 31 teams operating in Iraq, including the teams lead by the Italians and the Koreans. Observers from MNF-I and other military components, embassy offices, and the interagency attended this event. Presenters included senior military officials, embassy officials, UN representatives, and other representatives from both the governmental and non-governmental community. Over 90 persons participated in part of all of the conference. This cable provides a look into the overall results of the conference, and considers both the focus areas for the PRTs during 2008, and the transition of the program in the out-years. A separate cable will address issues discussed in a special Team Leader session.

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AMBASSADOR AND OPA DIRECTOR SET THE TONE  
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13. The Ambassador inaugurated the conference, pointing out that the teams are nearing the end of a one-year post-surge expansion. He proffered the rhetorical question to the team leaders - how do you work yourselves out of a job - to illustrate the temporary nature of the PRT, and the need to find effective ways to achieve success with their Iraqi counterparts. Success in the provinces will lead to a conditions-based and not calendar-based program transition. Until we reach that point, he offered, each PRT should continue to reach out to all corners of their respective province to positively impact the lives of as many Iraqis as possible.

14. The cornerstone to provincial government effectiveness, the Ambassador underscored, is the ability for budget execution on all levels of government, emphasizing that linkages within the provinces as well as back to Baghdad are absolutely vital. With provincial elections a distinct possibility, the teams need to prepare to support and work with staff from UNAMI, US-based and international-based NGOs. Finally, as US funding for Iraq continues to decrease, the teams must look for ways to use their limited

resources to fill funding gaps in the Iraqi budget, while working with Iraqi counterparts to request and expend Iraqi funds in the provinces. Again, solid linkages at the provincial and ministry level are paramount.

15. Following the Ambassador, the OPA Director provided the overall perspective for the conference, challenging the team leaders to start thinking about and discussing the factors and conditions within a province that would signal the eventual transformation to a more traditional bilateral relationship with the Government of Iraq.

With that understanding in mind, the conference focus returned to present PRT activities, in particular budget execution and team effectiveness working in the provinces, both being top concerns of the Washington interagency. While some PRTs have expanded their reach through the use of satellite offices, for example, the OPA Director suggested the team leaders not limit themselves in how they can improve interactions with their Iraqi counterparts at the provincial and local level.

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CONFERENCE RESULTS AND THE TRANSITION TO NORMALCY  
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16. The following are the highlights for more than 15 separate briefings and discussion sessions:

-- Political Briefing (Provincial Powers Law): POL section representatives provided an in-depth analysis and assessment on the impact of law's veto by VP Adel Abdul Mehdi; follow-on discussions covered possible impacts of the recent veto, underscoring that the Elections Law still remains tied to this legislation.

-- Political Briefing (Provincial Elections Overview and Panel Discussion): Representatives from the Political Section, USAID,

BAGHDAD 00000857 002 OF 004

UNAMI, and IFES explained that due to the complex timeline leading to elections, preparations continue despite the lack of an Elections Law or fixed date for provincial elections. The Council of Representatives (COR) and the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) will need to consider and decide on a number of vital issues including voter eligibility requirements, IDPs, open versus closed list, and candidate eligibility, to name a few. All panel members emphasized that the elections will be an all-Iraqi event with limited US support. At the same time, the PRTs will play a key role in this exercise, both to support election visitors needing access to the provinces, and also to provide atmospherics to the embassy before and during the elections season.

-- CETI Briefing (Coordinator for Economic Transition in Iraq): Ambassador Ries provided an overview of the economic and business situation, with special emphasis on budget execution, state owned enterprises, and banking. He highlighted the top five priorities in CETI: Ministry capacity, foreign and domestic investment, generation of energy, agriculture (represented by nearly one-quarter of the Iraqi population), and employment. Ambassador Ries called for the PRTs to provide economic indicators from the grassroots level, even if only anecdotal accounts on activities within the respective province.

-- MNC-I (Commanding General, 18th Airborne): LTG Austin, the newly arrived Corps commander, emphasized that success depends entirely on partnerships between the PRT and the military, noting that success is all about teamwork and not individual efforts. He called on both State and military to promote cross education, to make the effort to understand one another's work culture, and to apply that knowledge towards problem solving in Iraq. LTG Austin challenged the participants to work collectively on difficult tasks, using the CLC/Sons of Iraq as an example of a US initiative that is now worth our collective efforts to find a solution to transition these security elements into the Iraqi mainstream. In follow-on discussions, senior members of LTG Austin's staff reinforced the need for State and DoD members to make proactive efforts to further strengthen the relationships and operational capacity of the PRTs. While they found that that coordination and relationships at the PRT/BCT and the Corps level were strong, they indicated that the

same cannot be said at the Division level, a matter that needs some work.

-- Embassy Medical: The embassy's mental health officer led a lively discussion to explore the characteristics of successful team members, and those team members deemed not quite successful in the PRT environment. This discussion dovetailed into expectation management for perspective team members prior to ever arriving to Iraq. He also focused on the impact the team leaders have on all team members, and the need for the leaders to promote a positive working atmosphere. The team leaders were tasked to further reflect on this discussion once they returned back to the provinces, and to provide their top three team member observations, positive and negative, that might be useful for consideration by PRT recruiters.

-- Office of Hostage Affairs (OHA) and RSO: The OHA representative provided a background on hostage taking in Iraq, and punctuated her remarks by exhorting team leaders to maintain situational awareness at all times and avoid potential hostage taking situations. OHA offered to schedule on-site hostage awareness, prevention and survival training to the team members at the convenience of the respective PRTs. The Deputy RSO explained the RSO role with respect to PRT security, and clarified the difference between State-provided and military-provided movement security teams.

-- USAID: Given the significant presence of USAID programs in Iraq, the Country Director for USAID provided a detailed program overview, and explained how these programs might impact the work of the PRTs. He also explained the negative impact that the current budget situation could have on the future of USAID programs, indicating the need to begin demobilization by the mid-year if funding is not made available soon. The USAID piece was particularly valuable to the conference due to misconceptions and lack of understanding of how these programs work on the grassroots level, and how the lack of direct access by PRT team leaders contributes to this lack of clarity on programs in their respective provinces. The Director explained that coordination is always a challenge in Iraq, and that implementing partners often try to avoid direct USG contact for their own personnel security reasons. OPA recognizes this unique challenge, and the Director's presence at the conference was necessary to address these issues directly with the team leaders.

-- MNF-I (GEN Petraeus): Following his formal presentation on the positive security impact of the surge, GEN Petraeus expounded on the larger issue of fundamental changes with respect to shaping the USG future roles and contributions in Iraq. He viewed the interagency as key to ensuring that policy be synchronized and complemented with both pre-deployment and in-theater training. This would be necessary to ensure that both State and military units, and the PRTs, will be able to implement the desired changes. He challenged

BAGHDAD 00000857 003 OF 004

the PRT team leaders, as perhaps change agents, to develop ideas and actions that could contribute to the next significant phase shift in the USG activities in Iraq.

-- PRT Assessment and Long-Term Strategy: The OPA Strategy and Plans Officer provided a brief history of the planning effort within OPA, and brought the team leaders up-to-date on the assessments and Maturity Model that are used for evaluating the progress of each province. He explained how OPA uses a wide range of inputs from the USG community in Iraq to obtain the best possible and grounded assessment of each province, and to crystallize our sense of whether or not the province is making progress within the specific objective areas: Governance, Political Development, Political Reconciliation, Economic Development, and Rule of Law. All these actions, in coordination with the interagency work group process in Baghdad, are essential to determine when conditions are met that can demonstrate a province has reached a level of sustainable maturity, or better. This process will serve as the basis for OPA to recommend fundamental changes to the PRT system, signaling the time to begin the transition to normalcy, with the goal to establishing a more traditional bilateral relationship with the government of Iraq.

-- Transportation Issues: The Transportation Attache delivered a

very clear and fundamental message: transportation is the key enabler in Iraq, with initial focus on the primary modal forms of transportation such as ports, roads and bridges, aviation, and railway. The second focus area is ministry capacity and their ability for planning as well as budget execution. Iraq is a natural land bridge, he stressed, and that railroads can play a crucial role as regional leader for intermodal transportation.

-- Public Diplomacy and The Press: The PAS Counselor explained the role of the Provincial Support Unit within PAS that is specifically designed to provide cultural and press assistance to the teams. This unit, in coordination with the PD officer assigned to several PRTs, has access to a wide range of PD resources intended to carry messages from Iraq to the wider US and international audience. He highlighted specific capabilities, such as the International Visitors program and the past US visit by a group of Anbari sheiks, which are widely accessible and should be used by all PRTs.

-- UNOPS: Peter Sorensen, the Iraq Operations Center Director, described how UNOPS, a self-financed entity within the UN, managed over 26 projects worth USD 20 million during 2007. He stated that the UNOPS presence in Iraq is entirely project driven, while operating under a broad UN mandate to work in both conflict and post-conflict environments. To promote the positive impact that UNOPS could have on Iraq, Sorensen used a CERP-funded solid waste project in Kirkuk as an example of how a project can succeed when coordinated with the PRT and interwoven into the fabric of the structure of the municipality. In this particular case, he noted, cost savings due to quality project management has allowed the project to extend beyond its planned duration.

-- Additional valuable briefings were provided by Management (dedicated support to the PRTs), the Counterinsurgency Center in Taji (now available for joint US/Iraqi training, and also includes Iraqi sheikh and military/police active participation in the course), MNF-I Strategic Effects (current priority information tasks include Levels of National Employment, and a Literacy Campaign).

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CLOSING REMARKS BY OPA DIRECTOR  
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17. At the end of the second day, the OPA Director closed the conference by underscoring the importance of team leader and military interactions, and the direct impact these interactions will have on the success of the PRTs. She emphasized that 2008 is a crucial period for the PRTs now that the entire system is fully operational. As we are nearing the end of the first quarter of this calendar year, the Director explained to the team leaders that the immediate PRT planning efforts must focus on objectives and activities for the next 6 to 9 month window. Through these combined efforts, OPA should be in a solid position at the next Team Leader Conference to address mid-year adjustments for the PRTs, and to present the vision and framework for the rest of 2008 and beyond.

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COMMENT  
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18. Two specific themes resounded throughout the conference: the importance of interpersonal interactions and interagency coordination (not only between State and military, but also among participating agencies as well), and the eventual transformation of the PRT system from its current form to one that will lead towards the more traditional bilateral relationship of diplomacy and technical support. This transformation will probably be gradual albeit deliberate, and OPA recognizes the need to visualize how this transformation could be implemented in order to be prepared for that

BAGHDAD 00000857 004 OF 004

eventuality. Given this reality, OPA also recognizes that the PRT program can successfully arrive to that inevitable transition point only through vigorous implementation of strategies and work plans in concert with a transparent and thorough assessment process. Working together, those actions should provide OPA and the interagency with the sense of when the provinces have reached a sustainable level

where we can start the dialogue of pulling back. Returning to present day activities, OPA does not wish to lose sight that we have a challenging task at hand, and our success will depend upon support from the interagency as well as the will of the Government of Iraq.

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